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"Merry Christmas"

To Father who makes a day in  
New York as exciting as a  
Shaydullah jungle.

Dera

1931



POOR SHAYDULLAH



# POOR SHAYDULLAH



*Told and illustrated by*

BORIS ARTZYBASHEFF

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1931

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TO BETTY





NOW IN THE DAYS OF THE SULTAN,  
YAKOUB - EL - MANSOUR, MAY ALLAH  
grant him peace, rich and beautiful was the  
city of Marrakech. In the burning desert  
was it built and yet green and shady were  
the palm- and olive-tree gardens; and cool and  
clear were the waters in the fountains of which

there were an abundance. Great palaces were built and lofty towers, and from these rose the tower of Katoubia, the fairest of all. It stood like a beautiful queen among the lesser beauties and in all the world there was no better.

Rich and resplendent was Marrakech in the days of Yakoub-el-Mansour, and rich and proud were its people. But even among them some had more, some had less and some had nothing at all. Of these, the poorest of the poor was Shaydullah.

Now Shaydullah sat all day in the shade of the city gates and all day long the people from the four corners of the earth passed by him in a procession. Some men stopped to give him alms and Shaydullah thanked them in the name of the Prophet. But other men laughed

at him and went by and gave him nothing. Then Shaydullah did not get angry but he called after them softly,

“Fat-headed sons of the lame camel, ye may laugh for ye are ignorant, but I am I, Shaydullah, a good man and patient. Poor I may be now but Allah, Blessed be His Name, is merciful and when my time comes He will see that my share is given unto me. For all good men have a right to a share of Allah’s blessings, and I am good and deserving. A marble palace shall I have, with cool and restful gardens, and low will its fruits hang down within my easy reach. All day I shall sit and dream with the pleasant murmur of the fountains around me. And each day will be more lovely than the last.”

So sat Shaydullah by the city gates and the

people from the four corners of the earth passed by him in an endless procession.

Now the days also passed by. Uneasiness crept into Shaydullah and he began to fear lest he should lose his patience. Then Shaydullah rose up and he went to the Djemaa-el-Fna.

The Djemaa-el-Fna is the great market place. People come to it from the four corners of the world with their slaves and their camels and their donkeys; and the noise on the place is great. Vendors of couscous and sweetmeats there are, and comedians, snake charmers and tellers of tales, dancers and musicians too; and everything in profusion for all the world to see, to marvel at and to admire. Also on this place, but in a quieter corner and undisturbed, sit the old marabouts. The marabouts are the wise-men and they have a great deal of wisdom and

they are willing to share it with those who wish to learn or with those who simply like to ask questions, but all must have the price. Now the price of wisdom on the Djemaa-el-Fna is very small. So to the wisemen Shaydullah went.

“O wisest of men, I am Shaydullah, a good man and patient. All my life have I sat by the city gates and blessed Allah, for I knew that when my time had come my share would be given unto me. But the time was too long, the sun too hot and the mule drivers too ignorant of my goodness. What can be done so that I shall receive my share now? For my patience is nearly spent and my heart is full of bitterness.”

The old marabouts read in their wise book and they looked wise and said,

“Hast thou ever tried to work, Shaydullah?”

“No, for by work alone no man comes to riches, besides it is too tiresome.”

The wisemen looked wiser and they said,

“Hast thou ever tried to trade, Shaydullah, and become a merchant?”

“No, for the competition is very great and the life of a merchant is full of worries.”

Now the wisemen looked still wiser, and they cast furtive glances about them and when they saw that the Pasha’s guards were not about they said,

“Hast thou ever tried to steal?”

“Oh no! It is contrary to the teachings of the Prophet, besides it is very dangerous.”

Here the old marabouts threw up their hands and exclaimed,

“No one can answer thy question, Shaydullah, but Allah Himself. Blessed be His Name for He is all knowing and merciful.”

In his disappointment Shaydullah rose up and his head drooped down, and with it his shoulders; and in order not to fall he had to place his left foot in front of him, and so he made one step; and then he moved his right foot and made another step, left and right, left and right, on Shaydullah went. In this manner it was as easy to go forward as to stand still. So it came to pass that Shaydullah started on a long journey. As he walked he said to himself,

“All I can do is to go on and on until I find Allah and when I find Him, then shall I know why my share has not been given unto me.”

Now in the Great Mountains is a pass and it is called the Defile of Akra which means the Defile of Death. And when Shaydullah came upon it darkness had fallen, and with the darkness came the winds and the winds were very ferocious. Shaydullah looked around him for shelter and he saw a cavern, and he went in and found it to his liking. Dark it was, but warm and the winds could not enter. Then Shaydullah sat down and he said,

“Blessed be Allah, for I am but a poor lonely traveler, but lo, here is a place for my rest, very snug and comfortable.”

But when Shaydullah had said this he heard a deep sigh and he looked about him and he saw two eyes gleaming at him through the darkness. Now Shaydullah’s fear was great and he exclaimed,

“Who art thou, man or beast, and what may be thy purpose?”

Now there came toward him a lion. And when Shaydullah saw him he was affrighted and he wanted to run, but fear overcame him and he could not move. And the Lion said unto him,

“Be thou not affrighted, Stranger, for I will not harm thee.”

And then Shaydullah saw that the Lion seemed affrighted also. And the Lion looked old, with his bony flanks and scraggly mane, and eyes that were sad and watery. When Shaydullah beheld this his courage came back to him and he said,

“Let me stay in thy cave, Noble Beast, for the night is very dark and the winds very fero-  
cious. My name is Shaydullah and I travel with

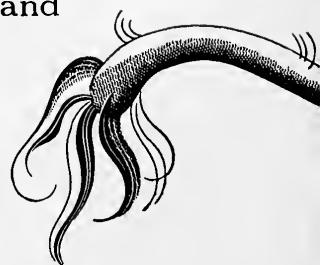
a purpose. For with the morning light I must start again on my journey and I must go until I come to Allah; and when I find Him, then shall I ask why my share of His Blessings has not been given unto me, for I am good and deserving."

Now when the Lion heard this he gave Shaydullah to eat of the wild shrubs and berries, which were also his food, and he made a bed for him and he said,

"When thou comest to the Almighty, O Shaydullah, ask Him for me too. Ask Him why it is, that being not old, yet I know naught of happiness and my health is far from perfect."

And Shaydullah promised.

Then they both slept and when the morning came the ferocious winds had subsided and







the sun was shining on the everlasting whiteness of the Great Mountains and many eagles soared above them.

Then Shaydullah thanked the Lion in the name of the Prophet and started off on his long journey.

NOW AFTER MANY DAYS OF TRAVEL  
SHAYDULLAH CAME UPON THE REGION  
of the Great Plain. And the sun was very hot  
and Shaydullah was tired and footsore. Then  
it was that Shaydullah saw a forest, and he  
felt a gladness in his heart for the forest was  
beautiful. Like a garden it was with lovely  
palms and silky grass and many blossoms.  
From bush to bush birds of gay plumage flew,  
singing joyfully.

Then to his delight Shaydullah found a brook whose waters looked cool and inviting, and near the shore grew a banana tree.

Thither Shaydullah hastened and he sat down and he said,

“Blessed be Allah, for I was hot and sore of foot, and hungry too, but lo, here is a cool place to rest and food to eat.” And he looked up in expectancy, but the Banana Tree was barren.

Now the Tree cried out to Shaydullah pitifully saying,

“Disappointed thou mayst be, O Stranger, but I pray thee be not angry but harken to my story. Each spring my blossoms come forth and then I am happy and full of hope, but the blossoms fade away and never, never do the bananas come in their stead to gladden my

countenance with their golden crescents and to make my life worth while."

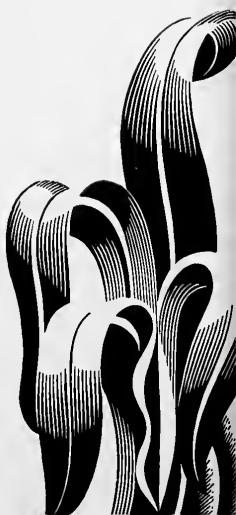
"This is bad for I am very hungry and I have traveled far. I am Shaydullah and I travel with a purpose. And when I am rested I must go on until I come to Allah, and when I find Him, then shall I ask why my share of His Blessings has not been given unto me, for I am good and deserving."

And the Tree looked very sad and she said,

"O noble and courageous Shaydullah, would that I could go with thee on thy quest, but I am only a tree and I cannot travel. Wilt thou ask Allah for me why it is I bear no fruit and cannot feed the hungry traveler?"

And Shaydullah promised.

Then Shaydullah lay down and fell asleep and the Banana Tree stood guard over him







and with her broad leaves made shade for him.

Now when Shaydullah awoke he felt much refreshed and bidding farewell to the Tree, started once more on his journey.

NOW SHAYDULLAH TROD ONWARD  
AND AFTER MANY DAYS HE FOUND  
himself among rocky crags and bowlders;  
and there was a fresh breeze upon his  
face. And out of the stillness there came a  
sound, and it was an even sound and meas-  
ured, like the beating of drums. And Shay-  
dullah climbed upon a rock and there before  
him stretched the shining waters of the Great  
Sea.

And the breakers with a mighty roar cast themselves upon the sands, turned, and with a heavy sigh, went back into the deep. Now Shaydullah's heart was filled with bitterness, for there were no ships upon the waters.

Then Shaydullah sat down and gave himself up unto weeping and in his sorrow he said,

“Good and deserving though I may be, yet long and fatiguing has been my journey and now, here is this water to prevent my traveling further.”

And so Shaydullah lamented, staring into the vastness, when lo, from the waters rose a sharp fin, then a broad back, and after the back came upward the head, and before Shaydullah appeared a fish. And the Fish cried out to him saying,







“Help, Stranger, help!”

“What ailest thou?” called Shaydullah.

And the Fish replied sadly,

“I am a big fish and strong, and I can swim hither and yon and upward and downward as may please me, for among all the fishes there is none other mine equal. But a burning pain tears at my throat and I do not know what is this thing which makes me suffer so. Help me, O Stranger, for indeed thou must be a wise marabout, sitting there in such meditation.”

“Be thou silent and cry not out, but take me upon thy back and carry me across the water. I am Shaydullah and I travel with a purpose, and when I reach the farther shore I must find Allah; and when I find Him, then shall I ask for my share of His Blessings, for I am a good man and deserving.”

Then the Fish said hopefully,  
“When thou findest the Most High One, O  
Shaydullah, wilt thou ask for me, too, why it  
is my pain is so unbearable though I know not  
the cause of it?”

And Shaydullah promised.

Then they sailed upon the shining waters  
and when they reached the farther shore Shay-  
dullah thanked the Fish and continued on his  
way.

Now Shaydullah praised Allah and he said,  
“Blessed be the Almighty, for the sea is  
very great and I am very small and lo, there  
was indeed a swift transportation for the  
weary traveler.”



THUS SHAYDULLAH REACHED THE GREAT DESERT WHICH IS CALLED THE Garden of Allah, albeit there is nothing but the gray ever-shifting sands: the dust of the ages upon the face of the earth.

Now when Shaydullah beheld the barrenness round about his heart became heavy within him and he sat down and wept bitterly. Meanwhile the night fell and the winds commenced to stir. And a wild tempest rose up

into the darkness and flung itself across the Desert, howling frightfully. The Desert shook; the Heavens dropped; and the sands and the storm clouds were mingled. Terrified, Shaydullah covered his face and fell flat upon the ground. And the winds raged and the sands flew over him, and with them came many monsters and demons and devas. The whole world was filled with the noise of the beating of wings and the cries and the braying of the Evil Ones.

“Ho, this is thy end, Shaydullah! Ho, thy time is come! Ho, for thy doom is at hand!”

And Shaydullah wailed pitifully and cried out and his cries rose up to heaven.

“O Allah, the Merciful, where art Thou? For here am I, poor Shaydullah. I have crossed the mountains and the plain and the sea in







my desire to find Thee and ask Thee for a share of Thy Blessings; and now, after my long and arduous journey I am smitten before I find Thee."

But behold, for as Shaydullah said this the raging storm ceased; the Evil Ones flew away; and a wonderful calm spread over the Desert.

And there appeared before Shaydullah a whirling ball of fire which was like unto the morning sun, but which came nearer and grew larger until it burst open like a wondrous rose, stretching forth dazzling petals of light. And out of the light there came a voice as strong as thunder, yet harmonious. And it said,

"I am Allah! I am the First and the Last and the world is mine, for I have created it out of the chaos. Truly this Desert is my dwelling place, but so are the sea, and the plain, and

the mountains; and even over the place Djemaa-el-Fna I am ever present.

“Thou art like a child, Shaydullah, who sits before an open door and cries because the door is closed, for thou seest not that the door is open.

“All things living and all things that are not living have their purpose and their worth. A share of my blessings is given, not unto him who desireth the fruit, yet sees not the ground which feedeth the roots; not unto him who seeth the treasure, yet takes it only because it glittereth; not unto him who hath the strength to take it, yet folds his hands and reclines upon the lap of idleness; but unto him who knoweth true value, understandeth the source and turneth not away from it, but reacheth forth. To him is given the key to the gardens of ever-

lasting pleasure. I, Allah, have favor unto him!

“Turn thy steps homeward, Shaydullah, for all that which thou desirest is there.

“I am Allah! I am the First and the Last and the world is mine. And if there be aught which pleaseth me, there is but to say, BE, and IT IS.”

Thus spake the Almighty to Shaydullah, and in the same majestic manner told him about the sad plights of his three friends, whom Shaydullah had nearly forgotten. And when Allah had finished His Angels sang praises unto Him in pleasant Harmony,

“O how just is the Most High Allah! How clear and magnificent is the fountain of His wisdom!

“By the Day when it brighteneth,

“By the Night when she spreadeth her veil.

BA







“Glory be to Him, for His weighty words  
give light and understanding unto the simple!”

NOW SHAYDULLAH WAS EXCEEDINGLY REJOICED AND WITH A LIGHT HEART and fleeting steps started on his homeward journey. As he went along he said to himself,

“Ah! The day is bright and I must hurry for a marble palace with cool and restful gardens is awaiting me. How lovely shall be my days! How envious the ignorant mule drivers!”

Soon he came upon the shore of the Great Sea where the Fish was anxiously waiting.

“Didst thou find Allah, O Shaydullah? And in His great mercy hath He explained to thee the cause of my unbearable pain?”

“Pain? Diamond? Ah yes. Hold thy peace a little longer, O Fish, and when thou hast carried me back across the sea I shall tell thee the cause of thy pain.”

They glided swiftly across the sparkling waters, even more swiftly than before, for indeed the Fish was very impatient. When they reached the farther shore Shaydullah climbed upon a rock, and turning round called down,

“That which causeth thy pain, O Simple One, is a rough diamond lodged in thy throat. Thou must have gulped it only because it glittered. I, Shaydullah, say unto thee, verily thy punishment is well deserved.”

Now the Fish was distraught, and pleaded,

“Turn thou unto me, O Wise One, and deliver me from my suffering. I am only a fish and this treasure is of no value to me.”

But Shaydullah heard not for he was already far into the distance.

“The sun is low and I must not tarry. My luxurious palace and fragrant gardens are awaiting me in all their splendor. A hundred faithful slaves are unrolling red carpets and spreading canopies of saffron for my welcome, while the court musicians are tuning their instruments ready to break forth in joyful melody for my pleasure.”

Thus talking to himself he came upon the Great Plain where the Banana Tree stood waiting.

“Hast thou found Allah, O Noble One? And hath He explained to thee why it is my

blossoms fade and I bear no golden fruit?"

"Thou hast a treasure chest buried beneath thy roots, my Simple One. I, Shaydullah, say unto thee, if thou desirest the fruit thou must needs know the ground which feedeth thy roots!"

"Praise be to Allah, the Knowing, the Wise!" exclaimed the Banana Tree. Then she stirred her leaves and shook her trunk, and tugged at her roots violently. The ground split open and lo, up came the treasure chest full to the brim with golden douros.

But Shaydullah saw them not for he was already far into the distance.

"I must hurry, for the sun is setting and it is growing dark. But my palace is ablaze with the light of many torches. A thousand willing and faithful slaves are preparing the perfumed

baths and arranging soft divans to give rest and comfort unto their master. They are spreading a feast worthy of the Sultan himself. There will be many kinds of couscous, each couscous more delicious than the last; rare and juicy fruits there will be, sweeter than honey and more fragrant than roses in the gardens of everlasting leisure. There will be trays piled high with sweetmeats ready to my hand, such sweets as please me best. Back upon soft cushions I shall recline and at the wink of my eye, slaves will rush eagerly toward me with golden goblets and cups of flowing wine. Now my musicians are striking the first notes of a melody, while the lovely dancers of my ayal clap their hands and stamp their dainty feet upon the carpet, ready to delight their master.

“The life of the rich, O Shaydullah, flows

like a lazy stream along the shores of joy and merriment!"

Thus talking to himself Shaydullah reached the country of the Great Mountains and his path became steep and narrow. Night had descended and a crescent moon stared pale and gloomy into the black pass of the Defile of Akra. Shaydullah trod onward, wrapping his burnous more carefully about him for the night was cold and misty.

And out of the stillness the voice of the Lion called to him,

"Hail to thee, Shaydullah!"

"Greetings, Noble Beast, and happy tidings,

for I, Shaydullah, have found Allah and He hath spoken unto me. A marble palace I shall have with cool and restful gardens. Clothed in silk and richest robes and seated upon soft green cushions, I shall eat and drink with healthy enjoyment. For I am Shaydullah and the full cup of prosperity is rightfully due unto me. Fare thee well, my friend, for I must hurry on."

But the Lion called after him saying,

"Hath not Allah in His great mercy told thee why it is that, being not old, yet I look old and know naught of happiness?"

"Ah, but yes! The Most High Allah spoke also of thee. He hath said that thou hast powerful paws, sharp teeth and curved claws with which to capture and to slay. He said thou livest in error, for instead of bold conquests

becoming to thy strength, thou foldest thy hands and sittest in idleness. All things living and all things that are not living have their purpose and their worth.”

Now the Lion sat up and scratched behind his ear thoughtfully, while Shaydullah continued,

“And the Exalted One also hath decreed that the proper food for a lion is flesh; but thou eatest of wild shrubs and berries and livest like a hermit in thy snug cavern. I, Shaydullah, say unto thee that thou shouldst know the source, see true value and take it!”

Now the Lion looked at Shaydullah, and he swished his tail and smacked his jaws and exclaimed:

“Grrrrr! The message of Allah's wisdom is like sweet music to my ears!”

And he sprang forward and opened his mouth very wide, and he swallowed up Shaydullah, and Shaydullah's burnous, and Shaydullah's slippers. Then he dashed down into the plains roaring mightily.

What! Is not Allah the most just of judges?  
The sun and the moon hath each its time,  
And each in its own sphere doth journey on.

THUS PASSED SHAYDULLAH, AND  
NEITHER HEAVEN NOR EARTH WEPT  
for him.

And the people from the four corners of the world, with their slaves and their donkeys and their camels, passed through the gates of Marrakech in an endless procession toward the great market place, Djemaa-el-Fna; and the noise on the place was great.

But who was that sitting hopefully in the shade of the city gates. Was it Shaydullah's brother?

*“And so doth Allah mislead whom He will, and whom He will doth he guide aright: and none knoweth the armies of thy Lord but Himself: and this is no other than a warning to mankind.”*

THE KORAN. SURA LXXIV.

